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Never mind stockpiling loo rolls and pasta in the understairs cupboard. What today's high-net-worth "super-prepper" wants is an ultra-isolated property with its own solar, wind or geothermal power, a strong encrypted phone signal and a location no more than two hours by road from London and the southeast.

Other must-haves might include a helicopter pad, farming land, a natural spring or borehole for fresh water and an underground bunker with potential to convert to swish accommodation in which to sit out any possible version of Armageddon, be that an act of war, another global pandemic or something too terrible to contemplate.

Spoiler alert. If you've seen the Long Island house with its own luxuriously appointed bunker – complete with huge TV poignantly showing *The Last One*, the *Friends* season finale – where Julia Roberts,

ALAN HARRIS/REUTERS/GETTY IMAGES; DOUG BRIDGEMAN/REUTERS



Splendid isolation

Right: No Man's Fort off the Isle of Wight sold at auction for £1.12 million

Ethan Hawke, Mahershala Ali and their kids hide out as New York City is bombed to oblivion in last year's Netflix film *Leave the World Behind*, you'll already be familiar with the super-survivalist picture.

The rural buying agent Jess Simpson, of Jess Simpson Property Search, is encountering more and more wealthy individuals who want to buy such a bolt hole "just in case". "Probably since the war in Ukraine started, I'm talking to a lot more people who are looking for a property or smaller country estate which they can get to easily in the event of an emergency," she says.

"These guys like to be in control. In the back of their minds they're always thinking about worst-case scenarios. These are powerful people who have everything they want with a click of their fingers, so this is just another thing to add to the list."

Simpson has had clients asking specifically for properties with bunkers. Another was keen on purchasing a house surrounded by land to grow crops in case food was rationed – or ran out. "They would have fenced it off, but not electrified I think. They were quite peaceful,

laid-back types, they wouldn't put up too much of a fight. A lot do have shotgun licences, however, which go hand-in-hand with their country estates."

While some of Simpson's clients catch helicopters as regularly as Logan Roy, not all do. "The two hours by road thing is quite a big factor," Simpson says. "Obviously, in the event of a disaster, traffic would be horrendous anyway, but there's a feeling that heading west from London would be easier than any other direction. Norfolk is an option, but it's just getting there. If you're in a hurry you're going to want to avoid the M25. It would be the ultimate downfall, stuck on the M25 while the zombies ran amok."

It's reported that in private Facebook groups wealthy US "super-survivalists" swap tips on gas masks, bunkers, air filtration systems and locations safe from the effects of climate change. One wealthy venture capitalist admits to taking classes in archery, presumably in case gun ammunition runs out.

New Zealand has long seemed to be the destination of choice for these waddled-up warriors. Way back before the pandemic it was well known that Peter Thiel, the billionaire venture capitalist who co-founded PayPal and was an early investor in Facebook, considered the country to be "the future".

And in 2017 Reid Hoffman, the billionaire LinkedIn founder and a former PayPal colleague of Thiel's, told The New Yorker that "saying you're 'buying a house in New

Zealand' is kind of a wink, wink, say no more".

Meanwhile Devon and Cornwall are top of the list for the London-based tech entrepreneurs and captains of industry who want to be able to shift family and staff out of danger at short notice, plus the Isles of Scilly for those who can fly or sail there.

Clare Coode, of Stacks Property Search, first witnessed the trend during Covid: "An ultra-high-net-worth couple in the tech industry bought a remote farm

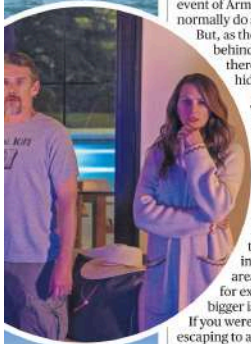
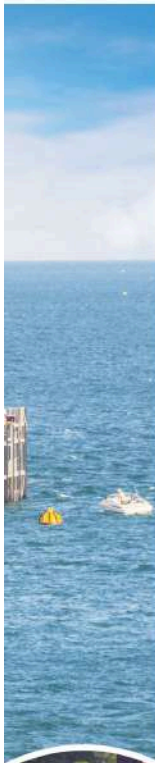
on Bodmin Moor in 2020 and, according to locals, erected barbed wire fencing and CCTV cameras all around the perimeter. There hasn't been sight nor sound of them since. Word from the local pub has it that they found the lifestyle boring."

They perhaps made their move too soon. In St Agnes, Cornwall, Lowen Barn Trevals, a converted barn with three bedrooms (one in an annexe), comes with solar panels, a polytunnel and a 50-person underground air raid

Clockwise from right: Ethan Hawke and Julia Roberts in *Leave the World Behind*; Sanda Island in Argyll and Bute; Lowen Barn Trevals in Cornwall; the Bowland Estate with a Tudor-gothic mansion in the Scottish Borders is on sale for £18.5 million with Knight Frank

You're a millionaire worried about Armageddon. What do you look for in a property? Agents reveal the secrets of the 'super-preppers'. By Jayne Dowle





shelter, as the RAF had a Spitfire base at nearby Perranporth airfield (still operational) in the Second World War.

A private jet might be handy for a quick getaway when your carbon footprint is the least of your concerns, but a couple of Simpson's clients have told her that, in preparation for potential disaster, they are already learning to fly seaplanes capable of landing on water or land.

The appeal of an island – or even a sea fort – is clear when chaos is all around. Savills recently sold No Man's Fort off the Isle of Wight at auction for £1.12 million. It has 23 en suite bedrooms, a helipad and appeared in a 1972 episode of *Doctor Who*, in which Jon Pertwee's Doctor fought the aquatic menace known as Sea Devils. Its twin, the armour-plated Spitbank Fort, fetched £1.01 million.

Or perhaps an island in Scotland? Where a seaplane could land, hopefully meeting the two-hour window. "I have had conversations recently where clients joked about how they have a place in the Outer Hebrides just in case the proverbial hits the fan," says Jamie Freeman, country specialist and director at Harington's UK. "When clients talk about moving somewhere completely off-grid in the event of Armageddon, they normally do so jokingly.

But, as the saying goes, behind every joke there's usually a hidden truth." "Seaplanes?" Tom Stewart-Moore, Knight Frank's head of rural agency in Scotland, says. "In my experience, with seaplanes in Scotland you tend to get them in the inland island areas. Loch Lomond, for example, has some bigger islands, sheltered.

If you were thinking of escaping to a Scottish island – Sanda Island, on sale for offers over £2.5 million, in Argyll and Bute, even has its own pub – it's more likely that people will have access to a fast Rib [rigid inflatable boat] or even a helicopter. A seaplane is a nice idea, but it would be very much weather-dependent up here."

Stewart-Moore acknowledges that while much of his Scottish patch is pleasingly remote, it wouldn't meet the "two hours from London" rule without air transport. "Around Newcastle could be a halfway point between London and Edinburgh, that might be an option," he suggests. A quick

check with GSC Grays, an estate agency selling prime properties in the Tyne Valley and Northumberland, confirms there have been no super-survivalist inquiries as yet.

If the disaster-wise super-preppers are heading west, would Wales be too far? "We have had two general inquiries for something like this in the last 18 months, although neither actually came to fruition," says Carol Peett, founder and owner of West Wales Property Finders, "I think they were both just sussing out whether Wales would be a suitable location for what they were after. Both were from the Greater London area.

"The budget for both seemed to be pretty flexible with a very sizeable top budget, which was what set them apart from usual requests from people looking for smallholdings to live the good life. A remote location being the top priority."

As well as land to keep a few cows, sheep, pigs, goats and chickens and to grow vegetables, these prepping property-seekers wanted a stream, river or pond for fishing or to stock with trout; to be down a long drive/track with no near neighbours; and accommodation for extended family and friends.

"West Wales is an ideal place for super-preppers as there are a wealth of properties, from farmhouses to mansions, with land and outbuildings," Peett adds. "West Wales is very accessible from the sea, and only a short hop from Ireland, and there are a number of aerodromes and airfields suitable for small planes to land. Helicopters could of course land on the fields."

Black humour aside, stockpiling property assets is a safe place to put your millions if the banks should fail, and could even generate passive income on a grand scale should homelessness ever become endemic. "Therefore perhaps these jokes mask genuine concerns about global instability and the desire for self-sufficiency," says Freeman. "As geopolitical tensions and environmental crises become increasingly commonplace, the appeal of off-grid living naturally grows. Consequently, more people might seriously consider independence from vulnerable infrastructure as a viable option to safeguard their future against unpredictable global events."

Put it like that and the loo rolls and pasta under the stairs seem like a drop in the ocean – which would have to be navigable by seaplane, of course.

“West Wales, with its sea and air access, is ideal for super-preppers”

DO YOUR PREP AND BUNKER DOWN

High-profile conflicts mean more people want underground shelters – particularly in the US, finds Emanuele Midolo

If they had killed him there would be a revolution right now," Ron Hubbard says of the failed assassination attempt on Donald Trump. The Texas-based owner of Atlas Survival Shelters is always primed for a disaster: he is a doomsday prepper and has been preparing for the end of the world for almost 15 years.

Hubbard (no relation to Scientology founder L Ron Hubbard) thinks civil war in the US isn't far away. He subscribes to the conspiracy theory that President Joe Biden "probably stole" the presidential election in 2020, and says that if it happens again in November "it will lead to some kind of revolution". This, in turn, could create a domino effect that could bring us to the verge of the Third World War.

Hubbard has plenty of customers who, he claims, want him to design shelters to prepare for this end-of-the-world scenario, including the billionaire CEO of Meta, Mark Zuckerberg, who has apparently asked him to help design a nuclear shelter within the \$100 million compound he is building in Hawaii.

But it's not just billionaires like Zuckerberg who are building bomb shelters and underground bunkers. Since the conflicts in Ukraine and Gaza, demand for shelters has gone through the roof among the less wealthy.

An average Atlas bunker costs about \$250,000 (£192,000) and can house a family of eight. They consist of a couple of bedrooms, one or two bathrooms, a living room and a kitchen. People can stay there as long as they wish to as long as they have enough supplies, Hubbard says. The bunkers have blastproof doors, electric generators, air filters and are at least a metre underground to shield those inside from radiation.

Atlas also offers much cheaper options, starting from \$20,000 for a precast bunker measuring about 100 sq ft that could fit a family of four for a few days. "They are made of precast concrete and are delivered like a septic tank and installed in a day," Hubbard says. "Customers can dig the hole, sink them in the ground, cover them up and be done. I have a waiting list for months for these."

Hubbard says the highest number of inquiries from

Mark Zuckerberg and Priscilla Chan have asked for a shelter in their Hawaii compound. Below: Atlas shelters cost on average £190,000, but the cheapest option starts at around £15,000



Europe come from the UK, followed by Germany and eastern European nations, and says he has recently built a 450 sq ft bunker at a country estate outside London. The biggest problem with building large bunkers in the UK, he says, is with space rather than planning rules.

Paul Weldon, the managing director of the UK-based Panic Room Company, says he has also seen a spike in inquiries and installations. Despite the name of his company, he says he's now building more bunkers and shelters than panic rooms. "Since the Ukraine war people are gradually realising that there could be an issue with the near future," he says. "It's quite interesting. Well, it's quite scary actually."

Weldon says his clients want to move away from London, where panic rooms were in high demand, to the countryside. The company is building bunkers in south Wales, Yorkshire and Warwickshire. Some of them double up as a man cave with a cinema, a wine cellar and a gym.

"We design them to be off-grid: they have their own power supply and satellite phones in case power and

communications are cut," Weldon says. The shelters have a filtration system that protects against nuclear, biological and chemical fallout – known as NBC. Prices for such a bunker at the Panic Room Company range from about £200,000 up to £2 million.

"We're not talking about the super-rich any more," Weldon says. "People lower down the scale are starting to protect themselves and their homes."

Weldon says his company is even in discussions with the government and local authorities to include "protected accommodation" in public housing schemes. If you are interested in historical bunkers, there are some on the open market. A new housing development on a former RAF airfield in Alconbury, Cambridgeshire, includes a Cold War nuclear bunker, although it's unclear what its final use will be. And on Thursday SDL Property Auctions is selling a nuclear bunker in Sedburgh, Cumbria. The starting price is £15,000.

"A lot of European countries are starting to spend big on shelters," Weldon adds. "It's a dangerous world."

ILLUSTRATION BY ALA STILA